

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
West Virginia State Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program Plan
Fiscal Years 2009 - 2013**

The West Virginia Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) plan is a dynamic document which will be updated as needed to utilize developing information, address changing needs and employ technological developments pertaining to wildlife habitat management. Program emphasis will be drawn from the West Virginia Habitat Management Plan and from consultation with the West Virginia State Technical Committee.

Objectives:

National objectives:

- Promote the restoration of declining or important native wildlife habitats.
- Protect, restore, develop, or enhance wildlife habitat of at risk species (federal and state T&E listed and candidate species).
- Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats.
- Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species habitats.

State objectives:

- Promote establishment and maintenance of grassland and early successional habitat types with management regimes most favorable to targeted species.
- Promote the restoration of Red Spruce, Balsam Fir, and American Chestnut populations.
- Promote control of invasive species having a negative impact on important wildlife habitat.
- Protect, restore and enhance riparian and water habitats important to Eastern Brook Trout, Woodcock and any of several native mussels.

The WHIP emphasis on uplands includes practices under the 645, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management and 647, Early Successional Habitat Development and Management standards. Field Borders, Warm Season Grass Plantings, Tree and Shrub Planting, Fencing to control access, and Perennial Food Plots will dominate the list of implemented practices.

NRCS will cooperate with partner agencies and NGOs to identify planting sites and communicate with landowners to garner interest in this practice. Red Spruce, Balsam Fir, and American Chestnut plantings will occur only on areas with appropriate site conditions to warrant a reasonable expectation of establishment success. Only American Chestnut seedlings, from stock exhibiting possible resistance to blight, will be used for plantings.

Primary emphasis on control of invasive plant species will be on sites where important native habitat is threatened by invasive species. NRCS promotes the most effective control method which presents the least danger to existing desirable species. The agency recommends procedures in harmony with the best integrated pest management policy. It is recognized that some invasive and noxious species may provide a benefit to wildlife in the form of cover and food. NRCS will not recommend the propagation of these species and will advocate their removal as circumstances dictate.

NRCS expects to work closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, WV DNR and Trout Unlimited to identify stream reaches for aquatic and riparian habitat improvement. A history of cooperation on aquatic and riparian habitat exists between these agencies. This relationship is central in efforts to protect sensitive waterways, wetlands, and riparian zones and to establish riparian vegetation to enhance the viability of these habitats for targeted stream and riparian species. Additional partners and information will come from the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, and the Ohio River Basin Habitat Partnership.

WHIP funding is divided between three ranking categories: upland, especially early successional habitat; aquatic and riparian habitat improvement including Eastern Brook Trout Habitat Improvement and Woodcock Habitat Improvement; and species of concern habitat improvement including Red Spruce, Balsam Fir and American Chestnut plantings. Distribution of funds will be based on estimated values for applications received at the end of established ranking periods.

Ranking questions are designed to prioritize applications based on the applicants desire to implement the most desirable practices and or management scheme related to the site's ability to sustain a viable population of the desired target species.

NRCS will gauge success of the program by the relative number of contracts written with targeted species habitat as the primary impact of contract items. The goal established by this plan is 50% of all allocated WHIP funds be obligated to meet these objectives. This plan will be reviewed yearly by the State Technical Committee.

Approved: _____ **Date** _____
Kevin Wickey, State Conservationist